

### Review: Kolosov, V.A.; Vendina, O.I. (Eds.): The Russian-Ukrainian border area - twenty years of disrupted unity: a monograph

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democratic traditions are very weak. According to N.I. Bukharin, up to 50% of Russian nationals still identify themselves as Soviet people. Thus, it is easy to understand the scholars' concerns about the fact that the current Russian governmental elite increasingly recognises and emphasises the connection between Soviet and Russian foreign policy. It raises concerns that Russia does not want to abandon the totalitarian past and nurtures an image of a successor to the communist state that rested on secret services. This fact had a negative influence not only on the development of Russian society, but also Russian-Polish relations, since the international community is increasingly convinced that Russia is changing on the outside remaining a Soviet state on the inside<sup>4</sup>.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the book under review is the first comprehensive research work on Russian-Polish relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that sets out to describe their history without intentional distortion and reaches accord on difficult issues. The book addresses acute and relevant topics giving rise to discussion and outlines possible topics for further research. There are some contradictions in the description of historical events given by Polish and Russian authors, but these contradictions are openly expressed and do not reveal any conflict nature. One can easily notice that the scholars from both countries recognise a close connection between history and politics and aspire to fairly treat the problem of Russian-Polish relations and agree that further study will definitely require granting the other party access to the national archives and telling the truth. The book will be of interest not only for specialists in international relations but for all those interested in the history of Russia and Poland.

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**Росси́йско-украи́нское пограничье: двадцать лет разделенного единства: монография / под ред. В. А. Колосова, О. И. Вендиной [The Russian-Ukrainian border area: twenty years of disrupted unity: a monograph / eds. V.A. Kolosov, O.I. Vendina]. М.: Новый хронограф, 2011. 352 с.**

Transborder cooperation between Russia and the neighbouring countries is a relatively new research topic for Russian economic geographers. Firstly, it can be explained by the fact that it is only after the collapse of the USSR, when the barrier function of the border weakened and the contact one increased. Secondly, it relates to global trends towards the expansion of trans-

<sup>4</sup> *Wałęsa L. Moja III RP. Warszawa, 2007. S. 137.*

border connections. Thirdly, the greatest part of the Russian state border is that on new independent states that emerged in 1991.

The problem has been studied insufficiently, thus, it is difficult to prove the need for an increased attention to transborder cooperation as a source of development of border regions of the Russian Federation and recommend certain means to improve such connections. This circumstance, in its turn, makes it impossible for scholars involved in transborder cooperation studies to receive the necessary funding for such research from the federal and regional budgets. Little attention given to the peculiarity of border regions of the Russian Federation aggravates the situation in many of them that are mainly focusing on their connection with other Russian regions against the background of insufficient cooperation with the neighbours across the state border.

The monograph under review is prepared by researchers from the Laboratory for Geopolitical Studies of the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences (V. A. Kolosov, O. I. Vendina, A. I. Gertsen, A. A. Gritsenko, T. Yu. Zhurzhenko, M. V. Zotrova, M. P. Krylov), the acting chair of the executive committee of the Council for Border Regions of the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine, A. M. Kiryukhin (Kharkov), the senior research fellow of the Institute of Geography of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, I. G. Savchuk (Kyiv). Despite the large team of authors, the work shows a shared understanding of the need for Russian-Ukrainian transborder cooperation and a shared assessment of the current level of mutual connections as unsatisfactory but exhibiting a significant potential. The monograph emphasises the political nature of the problem, the priority of politics over economy in making decisions on the possible expansion of transborder connections. At the same times, the authors give positive examples of cooperation between the neighbouring regions of the two countries and emphasise ensuing benefits.

The chapter entitled *The phenomenon of the state border* (written by V. A. Kolosov) is of significant theoretical value. On the basis of the earlier formulated methodological and theoretical approaches, the author develops the theory and methodology for research on transborder territories. He makes use of the data provided by other scholars (predominantly foreign ones) and takes into account the data on the Russian-Ukrainian border area. Of considerable practical value is the methodological PPP (politics-perception-practice) approach used in the monograph. Its successful adaptation in Russia and the region under consideration is carried out in various sections of the book and can serve as an example for doing research into other sections of the Russian state border.

On the basis of vast empirical material obtained in special surveys, the chapter entitled *Russian-Ukrainian border: morphology, economy, migration, and historical memory* offers a comprehensive analysis of the peculiarities of Russian-Ukrainian transborder connections. One should pay special attention to cooperation between the Belgorod and Kharkov regions analysed in the monograph — this experience can be of practical use in other border regions of Russia.

The chapter *Cross-border cooperation and the prospects of Euroregions* identifies, inter alia, weak points of Russia's participation in transborder cooperation and gives recommendations regarding the improvement of the situation.

Sketch maps offered in the appendix illustrate the socioeconomic situation in the Russian-Ukrainian border area.

The practical results obtained by the authors of the monograph can attract considerable interest not only of those doing research into the Russian-Ukrainian border areas, but also those interested in other territories situated along the Russian border, including the Baltic Sea region. There is an obvious need for increased attention to the border regions of the Russian Federation and stimulation of transborder cooperation by the federal centre.

The experience in transborder studies of the Baltic Sea region gained by the scholars of the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, including the author of the review, shows that the EU member states pay significant attention to the development of mutual connections between border territories of neighbouring countries. Of course, an important factor in this context is the absence of visa barriers. However, the EU and its member states pursue an active policy towards the development of various forms of transborder cooperation: special research programmes are implemented; border regions receive additional financing from the EU structural funds, etc. As a result, the contact function of the border between the EU member states increasingly prevails over the barrier one. In certain cases, economic growth poles develop in the border regions of neighbouring countries in the form of transborder clusters. We hope that the experience of our western neighbours and expansion of research on socioeconomic and political processes taking place along the Russian border will make it possible to solve the problems of the development of Russian border regions more effectively.

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